

THE OIL AND THE VESSELS

NO. 1467A

A SERMON
WRITTEN AT MENTONE,
BY C. H. SPURGEON.

*“And it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said unto her son,
Bring me another vessel. And he said unto her, There is not a vessel more. And the oil ceased.”
2 Kings 4:6.*

SO long as there were vessels to be filled, the miraculous flow of oil continued and it only ceased when there were no more jars to contain it. The prophet spoke no word to stop the multiplying process and the Lord did not set any boundary to the bountiful marvel—the poor widow was not straitened in God, but in her supply of empty vessels! Nothing else in the universe restrained the flow of oil, but the want of vessels to receive the oil stopped it at once. The vessels failed before the oil—our powers of receiving will give out long before God’s power of bestowing.

This is true in reference to our PROVIDENTIAL CIRCUMSTANCES. So long as we have needs, we shall have supplies and we shall find our necessities exhausted far sooner than the divine bounty. In the wilderness there fell more manna than the tribes could eat and there flowed more water than the hosts could drink, and as long as they were in a desert land and required this provision, it was given to them. When they reached Canaan and fed on the old corn of the land, the special supplies ceased—but not till then. In the same manner the Lord will feed His people till they need no more.

The widow’s apparent source of supply was only one pot of oil, but this continued to stream forth as vessel by vessel was placed underneath it. So shall the little, with which the Lord endows His poor people, continue to be sufficient from day to day till the last day of life, like the last vessel, shall have been filled. Some are not content with this, but would have the oil run beyond the last vessel, even after their deaths, never resting till they have hoarded their thousands and have buried their hearts in gold dust. If the oil will but run till the last vessel is full, what more do we want? If providence secures us food and raiment till we end this mortal life, what more can we require?

Doubtless in the dispensation of wealth and other talents to His servants, the Lord considers their capacities. If they had more vessels, they should have more oil. The infinitely wise God knows that it is better for some men to be poor than rich—they would not be able to bear prosperity and so the oil does not flow, because there is not a vessel to fill. If we are able to receive an earthly gift, it will then be a good thing to us and the Lord has declared that He will not withhold any good thing from those who walk uprightly. But a talent which we could not receive so as to use it properly would be only a curse to us and therefore He does not burden us with it. All that we can hold we shall have—all that we really need, all that we shall be sure to employ to His glory, all that will minister to our highest good—God will pour forth from His inexhaustible fullness and only when He sees that the gifts would be wasted by becoming superfluities, or burdensome responsibilities, or occasions for temptation, will He restrain His power and the oil shall cease. Rest assured that God’s bounty will keep pace with your true capacity and “verily you shall be fed.”

The same principle holds good with regard to THE BESTOWAL OF SAVING GRACE. In a congregation, the gospel is as the pot of oil and those who receive from it are needy souls, desirous of the grace of God. Of these we have always too few in our assemblies. Many are the vessels of oil, filled to

the brim and fastened down—the full Pharisee, the self-satisfied professor, and the proud worldling are such—for these the miracle of grace has no multiplying power for they are ready to overflow even now. A full Christ is for empty sinners and for empty sinners only. As long as there is a really empty soul in a congregation, the Word of God will go forth as a blessing, but no longer.

It is not our emptiness, but our fullness which can hinder the outgoings of free grace. While there is one soul conscious of sin and eager for pardon, grace will flow. Yes, while there is one heart weary of indifference and anxious to be wounded, grace will flow. “I feel,” says one, “exceedingly unfit to be saved.” You are evidently empty and there is room in you for the oil of grace. “Alas,” cries a second, “I feel nothing at all; even my own unfitness does not distress me.” This only shows how utterly empty you are, and in you also the oil will find space for its flow. “Ah!” sighs a third, “I have become skeptical. Unbelief has made me hard as the nether millstone.” In you also there is large storage for grace. Only be willing to receive. Stand like the oil jar with opened mouth, waiting for the oil to pour forth from the miraculous pot. If the Lord has made you willing to receive, He will not be long before He has given you grace upon grace. O that we could meet with more emptied souls! Why should the Lord’s wonders be cut short for lack of persons who need to have them worked upon them? Are there no needy souls about? Have all men waxed rich or is it a vain presumption which possesses so many hearts? Hidden away in corners where they weep their eyes out because they cannot weep and break their hearts because their hearts will not break—and cry before the Lord because they feel they cannot pray, or feel, or hate sin—hidden away in corners, I say, there are truly empty souls and for these the heavenly oil is still running, is running *now*. “Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.” No exception in the narrative before us was taken to any vessel so long as it was empty. There was one qualification and only one—the power to receive indicated by emptiness. Come, then, you needy souls, come to the eternal fountain and receive a wealth of blessing, freely given because you need it and because the Lord Jesus loves to bestow it.

The same is true with regard to OTHER SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS. All fullness dwells in our Lord Jesus and as He needs not grace for Himself, it is stored up in Him that He may give it out to believers. The saints with one voice confess, “Of His fullness have we all received.” The limit of His outpouring is our capacity to receive and that limit is often set by our straitened prayers, “We have not because we ask not or because we ask amiss.” If our desires were more expanded, our receipts would be more extended. We fail to bring empty vessels and therefore the oil is stopped. We do not sufficiently see our poverty and do not, therefore, enlarge our longings. O for a heart insatiable for Christ, a soul more greedy than the grave itself which is never satisfied, then would rivers of the heavenly oil flow in upon us and we should be filled with all the fullness of God.

Frequently we limit the Holy One of Israel by our unbelief. Nothing hinders grace like this impoverishing vice. “He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.” Unbelief declares it to be impossible that more oil should come from the oil pot and so refuses to bring more vessels under the pretense of a humble fear of presumption and thus robbing the soul and dishonoring the Lord. Shame on you, you mother of famine, you drier up of flowing wells! What shall be done unto you, you lying traitor! What coals of juniper are fierce enough for you, you wicked unbelief? We mourn that our joy is departed, that our graces languish, that our usefulness is restrained. Whose fault is this? Is the Spirit of the Lord straitened? Are these His doings? No, verily, we have ourselves stayed the bottles of heaven. May infinite mercy save us from ourselves and lead us now to “bring here vessels, even empty vessels not a few.”

Pride also has a horrible power to stop the divinely-given oil. When on our knees we feel no pressing necessity, no urgent need, no special danger, and on the contrary, we feel we are rich and increased in

goods and have need of nothing, do we wonder then that we are not refreshed and feel no delight in the holy exercise? Have we not heard the Lord saying, “Bring Me another vessel”? And as we have answered, “There are no more vessels,” can we be surprised that the oil is stayed? May the Lord save us from the parching influence of conceit. It will turn an Eden into a wilderness. Poverty of soul leads to fullness, but carnal security creates barrenness. The Holy Spirit delights to comfort every hungry heart, but the full soul loathes the honeycomb of the Spirit’s consolations and leaves it to itself till it is famished and cries out for heavenly bread. Of this one thing let us be sure—that there is abundance of grace to be had so long as we hunger and thirst after it—and never shall a single willing heart be forced to cry, “The oil is stayed,” so long as it has an empty vessel to bring.

The same truth will be proved in reference to THE PURPOSES OF GRACE IN THE WORLD. The fullness of divine grace will be equal to every demand upon it till the end of time. Men will never be saved apart from the atonement of our Lord Jesus, but never will that ransom price be found insufficient to redeem the souls that trust in the Redeemer—

*“Dear dying Lamb, Your precious blood
Shall never lose its power,
Till all the ransomed church of God
Is saved to sin no more.”*

Neither will His intercession lose any of its prevalence for those who come to God by Him. To the last hour of time it shall never be said that a single sinner has sought His face in vain or that an empty vessel has at last been found which Jesus cannot fill.

The power of the Holy Spirit to convict, convert, console, and sanctify shall also abide the same to the end of the age. Never will there be found a weeping penitent whom He cannot cheer with a lively hope and lead to Jesus for eternal salvation, nor a struggling believer whom He cannot lead on to certain and complete victory. Perfection itself, He shall always be able to work in all the saints, even meetness for their holy heritage above. None of us should despond when we discover anew our own natural inability and deadness. Our hope was never based on created power—a lively hope has its foundation in the omnipotence of the Holy Spirit—and that cannot be the subject of question or of change. For the salvation of all the elect, the sacred Trinity will work together till all shall be accomplished.

Whatever remains behind as to the purposes of God, He has power to achieve. If there should stand before us a row of empty vessels bearing the names of Babylon overthrown, the Jews converted, the nations evangelized, the idols abolished, and so forth, we must by no means be disheartened, for all these vessels of promise shall be filled in due time. The church of the present day is feeble and her supplies are quite inadequate to the enterprise before her, yet as out of one pot of oil many vessels were filled which were far greater than itself—so by His poor and despised church, through the foolishness of preaching—the Lord will fulfill His august designs and fill the universe with praise. “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” With this assurance, believing men may boldly go forth among the heathen. The nations are empty vessels and there are not a few of them. God has given us His blessing upon our cruse of oil and all we have to do is to pour out and continue to pour out till there is not a vessel left. We are very far from that consummation—even in our congregations all are not saved—even in our families many are not converted. We cannot say, “There is not a vessel left,” and blessed be God, neither may we suspect that the oil will be stayed. With hopeful earnestness let us bring the empty vessels beneath the sacred outflow that they may be filled.

How glorious will be the consummation when all the chosen shall be gathered in! Then there shall not remain a seeking soul to be saved, or a praying heart to be comforted, or a wandering sheep to be sought. Not a vessel shall be found throughout the universe needing to be filled and then shall the oil of

mercy cease to flow and justice hold her court alone. Woe unto the ungodly in that day, for then the empty vessels shall be broken to shivers, as they would not receive the oil of love, they shall be each one filled with the wine of wrath. From which terrible doom may infinite grace preserve each one of us. Amen.

Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Version 1.0, Ages Software.

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